



RICHMOND CITY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF
RICHMOND CITY JAIL
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C.T. WOODY, JR., SHERIFF

NEWS RELEASE

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RICHMOND CITY JAIL RESIDENTS PARTICIPATE IN LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGN TO PRESIDENT

Richmond City Jail residents wrote over 300 letters to President Barack Obama as part of a national letter writing campaign as recommended by Pam Hyde, Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health and Services Administration (SAMHSA). Hyde suggested, "Would be great to get a lot of folks in recovery to write the President, just telling him stories of their lives and how he and the federal government could help." The letters told life stories and included suggestions on how the federal government could better help them face their challenges.

The letters included stories of Vincent, an inmate who watched his father die in his arms; Dale, who has been an addict since age 11; and Marvin, whose biggest hope is to be in his daughter's life and teach her how to be respectable, responsible and reliable.

Amidst the stories of hardship and challenges, the inmates explained to President Obama how badly they want to turn their lives around and how much they would appreciate his help and support.

"I'm more determined now to quit," an inmate named Lewis said. "I just hope I get another chance to be in an atmosphere of recovery. I hope someone helps me help myself because I don't want to die using."

Many of the letters mentioned their experiences in the R.E.A.L. (Recovering from Everyday Addictive Lifestyles), a program in the Richmond City Jail started in May 2014 by Sheriff C.T. Woody, Jr. and Internal Program Director Dr. Sarah Scarbrough and operated in collaboration with the McShin Foundation. R.E.A.L provides about 70 male residents at a time an opportunity to participate in a behavioral modification and addiction program; many participants have never had the opportunity to participate in a program before. Maurice, an inmate at the jail, described the program as being "run by good people who just by being here just show that they care."

"The program saved me," a participant named Samuel said. "I'm at peace with myself, content with the time, and reading the NA Book to better learn about my addiction."

The Richmond City Sheriff's Office is responsible for maintaining a secure jail and a safe court system, along with seamless inmate transport and civil process to preserve public safety. We remain committed to performing these duties with unsurpassed integrity and professionalism, with progressive training that incorporates best practices and technology. While partnering with the community, we strive to lower recidivism by providing faith-based and community-based programming that empowers ex-offenders to become productive members of society.

The residents encouraged President Obama to help create additional recovery programs. Some specifically said that inmates with drug charges should be put in a drug treatment program prior to incarceration, arguing that “locking someone up” does not enable them to change. They also suggested other alternatives to incarceration, including work release and counseling.

Residents also urged the government not to stereotype violent offenders. Some stated that drug crimes should not be classified the same way as crimes such as murder and armed robbery.

Other suggestions included more help from government to help former convicts get back on their feet and easier ways to obtain public housing.

The Richmond City Jail residents who wrote letters hope that sharing their stories helps the federal government understand both their past and their commitment to changing their future.

“I am not proud of what I did or who I became. But I feel that the only thing that did keep me from becoming a complete savage was my conscience and my love for my children,” Vincent said. “Now I supremely fight to get back what I almost lost.”

It is the mission of the Richmond City Jail’s Program Department to provide opportunities for each inmate to reclaim, transform, and restore their life. Providing opportunities such as this letter writing campaign helps empower residents and to get involved with the process of changing the system.
